SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

LANSING, MICHIGAN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE SEN. GILDA Z. JACOBS

APRIL 21, 2005 517/373-7888

SENATE DEMOCRATS ANNOUNCE "CONSUMER RIGHTS" AGENDA

LANSING- Just what kind of "rights" should Michigan consumers expect? Plenty, say Michigan Senate Democrats.

Leading members of the Senate Democratic Caucus unveiled what they call their "Consumer Rights Agenda" today. Senate Democrats believe that Michigan's consumers have every reason to expect the Legislature to enact such basic safeguards.

"Consumers are entitled to privacy, ethical treatment, and accountability from all those with whom they do business," said Sen. Gilda Z. Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods). "Michigan Senate Democrats are promoting tough new laws that will help protect consumers and provide peace of mind."

The Senate Democrats announced that they will be introducing over a dozen new consumer protection measures. Their new bills will include provisions that would:

- Provide fines for credit counseling agencies that charge up-front fees with the promise to relieving a consumer's debt but then fail to deliver any service.
- Establish criminal penalties for data management companies that knowingly fail to notify consumers that their personal data has been lost or stolen.
- Provide consumers with protection against theft of Social Security numbers by allowing people the option of proactively changing pin numbers or control access numbers.
- Prohibit financial institutions from sharing personal information without obtaining the consumer's consent, require a consumer "opt-in" for the sharing of information with an unaffiliated third party, and provide the opportunity to "optout" of sharing information with a financial institution's affiliates.
- Un-bundle charges on electricity & gas bills and require clear explanations of charges.
- Provide consumers relief, including damages and reasonable attorney fees, for individuals injured directly or indirectly as a result of an insurance company's violation of unfair trade practices

"The reality is that not all consumers are receiving fair and equitable treatment," said Sen. Martha G. Scott (D-Highland Park). "Auto and homeowners insurance is just one example of where consumers are being treated unfairly."

Senate Democrats have been fighting all session on behalf of Michigan consumers. Among their important legislative victories is Public Act 434, sponsored by Sen. Hansen Clarke (D-Detroit), which establishes criminal penalties for landlords who knowingly rent housing units contaminated with lead paint poisoning.

"The poor are the most vulnerable and easiest to exploit," said Sen. Clark-Coleman (D-Detroit). "Democrats recognize that we have a moral responsibility to protect society's most vulnerable citizens."

You can learn more about the policy agenda of Michigan Senate Democrats by visiting www.senate.michigan.gov/dem.

###

Please Note:

An audio file of Senators Martha G. Scott and Irma Clark-Coleman commenting on the Senate Democrats' Consumer Rights Agenda can be downloaded at the following web addresses:

State Senator Martha Scott:

http://www.senate.mi.gov/Audio%20Clips/02-042105.wav

State Senator Irma Clark-Coleman:

http://www.senate.mi.gov/Audio%20Clips/03-042105.wav